

THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Office of Downtown Development



Georgia Dept. of Community Affairs



Better Hometown



Classic Main Street

History and Overview of the Georgia Main Street/Better Hometown Program

In 1980, Georgia was one of six pilot states to begin a statewide program of downtown economic development called Main Street. The Georgia Main Street Program is based on the simple but effective four-point approach originated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Main Street is a comprehensive revitalization process that improves all aspects of a commercial district. It successfully integrates the practical management strategy with the physical improvement of buildings and public spaces, aggressive promotion and image building, and the economic development of the area. Essential to the successful Main Street is a professional program manager to coordinate the downtown revitalization program. Currently, Georgia has 105 Better Hometown and Main Street cities that operate under the Georgia Main Street Program umbrella.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Office of Downtown Development focuses on economic development through downtown revitalization, heritage preservation and restoring a sense of place. The Classic Main Street Program and the Better Hometown Program (Georgia's small-town Main Street Program) are self-help community development programs designed to improve a downtown's quality of life. Each designated city receives technical assistance and resources, which assist the local community in their efforts to build a stronger local economy through revitalization of the downtown area.

Technical assistance and advice designed to stimulate downtown revitalization are provided to designated cities through a public/private partnership between the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Georgia Municipal Association, Georgia Power Company, MEAG Power, Georgia Electric Membership Cooperation, Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, Community Developer's Forum, Georgia Downtown Association, University of Georgia's Business Outreach Services, University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design, Georgia Department of Natural Resources - Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Department of Industry, Trade & Tourism and United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development.

Both programs follow a national model called **The Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization™**.

The National Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization™

Main Street is a philosophy, a program and a proven comprehensive approach to downtown commercial district revitalization. This approach has been implemented in over 1,800 cities and towns in 44 states across the nation with the help of the National Main Street Center and statewide downtown revitalization programs.

The success of the Main Street approach is based on its comprehensive nature. By carefully integrating four points into a practical downtown management strategy, a local Main Street program will produce fundamental changes in a community's economic base.

Organization involves building a Main Street framework that is well represented by business and property owners, bankers, citizens, public officials, chambers of commerce and other local economic development organizations. Everyone must work together to maintain a long-term effort.

Promotion creates excitement downtown. Street festivals, parades, retail events and image development campaigns are some of the ways Main Street encourages customer traffic. Promotion involves marketing an enticing image to shoppers, investors and visitors and also positioning the downtown in the market place.

Design enhances the attractiveness of the business district. Historic building rehabilitation, street and alley clean-up, colorful banners, landscaping and lighting all improve the physical image of the downtown as a quality place to shop, work, walk, invest in and live. Design improvements result in a reinvestment of public and private dollars to downtown.

Economic Restructuring involves analyzing current market forces to develop long-term solutions. Recruiting new businesses, creatively converting unused space for new uses and sharpening the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants are examples of economic restructuring activities.

The Eight Principles Guiding Successful Main Street Programs

1. **Comprehensive.** A single project cannot revitalize a downtown or commercial neighborhood. An ongoing series of initiatives is vital to build community support and create lasting progress.
2. **Incremental.** Small projects make a big difference. They demonstrate that "things are happening" on Main Street and hone the skills and confidence the program will need to tackle more complex projects.
3. **Self-Help.** The State can provide valuable direction and technical assistance, but only local leadership can breed long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.
4. **Public / Private Partnership.** Every local Main Street program needs the support and expertise of both the public and private sectors. For an effective partnership, each must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the other.
5. **Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Unique offerings and local assets provide the solid foundation for a successful Main Street initiative.
6. **Quality.** From storefront design to promotional campaigns to special events, quality must be instilled in the organization.
7. **Change.** Changing community attitudes and habits is essential to bring about a commercial district renaissance. A carefully planned Main Street program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.
8. **Action Oriented.** Frequent visible changes in the look and activities of the commercial district will reinforce the perception of positive change. Small, but dramatic, improvements early in the process will remind the community that the revitalization effort is underway.

Program Services

The following services are provided after formal designation as a Main Street/Better Hometown City:

- **Resource Team Visit.** The Resource Team is a team of consultants tailored to the special needs of the community. The team will spend approximately two days in the community assessing existing conditions and making realistic suggestions for capitalizing on resources. At the end of the visit, a public presentation of findings is held. A written report is forwarded to the community within sixty days following the team visit. The resource team report is intended to be used as a working document to guide the activities of the Main Street/Better Hometown program in its formative years.
- **On-Site Visits.** Periodic visits to provide assistance and monitor the progress of the community's program of work.
- **Technical Assistance.** A variety of resources are available to Main Street/Better Hometown designated communities at no cost. Resources available from DCA are training for program manager, assistance with DCA grants, assistance with community planning, economic restructuring, marketing and promotion, downtown

design, leadership development, committee development, and overall organization of the Main Street/Better Hometown Program.

Other resources that are available from our public/private partners either free of charge or for a nominal fee include:

- Planning and strategy meetings
 - Demographic and market analysis
 - Community survey instruments
 - Business retention and expansion surveys
 - Assistance in historic building rehabilitation and tax credits (Historic Preservation Division and Georgia Trust)
 - Recruitment of retail and commercial business (University of Georgia's Business Outreach Services)
- **Design Assistance.** A wide-range of design assistance is available to designated Main Street/Better Hometown communities. Some design services include: façade rehabilitation drawings, historic building materials recommendations, design alternatives to modern structures, paint color recommendations, streetscapes, landscape plans, planting plans, park designs, signage, highway corridor planning, greenways, community gateways, review of development ordinances, and assistance with acquiring Request for Qualifications for use in hiring of professional architects, engineers, and planners.
 - **Manager Training.** The Office of Downtown Development offers workshops, seminars and training programs on an annual basis. Training sessions are presented by staff, the National Trusts' National Main Street Center and other leaders in the field of downtown development to Main Street/Better Hometown Managers, Downtown Development Authority members, Program Board members and others interested in downtown development. Registration fees for training offered by the Office of Downtown Development are kept very low. However, travel expenses, lodging and meals are the responsibility of the local program.
 - **Regional Networking Sessions.** The Department of Community Affairs, with the assistance of a rotating host community, organizes networking sessions held regionally throughout the state. The sessions are typically held quarterly and are designed to give program managers the opportunity to share ideas and discuss problems.
 - **Website.** The Office of Downtown Development's website promotes each Main Street/Better Hometown community with a community description, a picture, a calendar of events and links to other community websites. The website also provides a means for networking. Main Street/Better Hometown Communities are encouraged to submit their success stories for posting on the website. These success stories provide others with "tried and true" results.

Minimum Standards for Designated Main Street/Better Hometown Communities

These criteria are based on best practices distilled from our most successful Georgia Better Hometown and Main Street cities' experiences and the National Main Street Center's minimum standards and is the basis for evaluating downtown revitalization programs.

- Has broad-based community support for the commercial district revitalization process, with strong support from both the public and private sectors
- Has developed vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and to the local Better Hometown/Main Street program's organizational stage
- Has an annual comprehensive Better Hometown/Main Street work plan with goals and objectives based on the 4 Points (Organization, Design, Promotions, Economic Restructuring)
- Possesses an historic preservation ethic
- Has an active board of directors and committees that utilize the Main Street 4 Point Approach™

- Has an adequate operating budget with income from a variety of sources
- Has a paid professional program manager (20 hrs./wk. minimum for Better Hometown cities; Full-time for Main Street cities)
- Participates in on-going training for staff, board and volunteers
- Reports key statistics (completes the required Economic Activity Reports* in a timely manner)

The Office of Downtown Developments' ability to assist a community in revitalizing its downtown is dependent upon the local commitment. Therefore, all designees will be required to enter into a Letter of Agreement with the Office of Downtown Development, which specifies that failure to comply with any of the above minimum requirements is reason for removal of Main Street/Better Hometown Designation and dismissal from the program.

Eligibility Requirements

- In order to apply for Classic Main Street designation, the city must have a population between 5,000 and 50,000 according to the 2000 census. In order to apply for Better Hometown designation, the city must have a population under 5,000 according to the 2000 census.

For more information, please contact:

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